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ABSTRACT

Effective schools research has identified many characteristics of schools that are unusually successful in fostering student achievement. One interpretation of these findings emphasizes the shared values of all school participants which constitute the ethos of the school. This paper presents a conceptual framework for studying the processes of cultural transformation, focusing on teachers whose beliefs, values, and behaviors affect student learning. The study concentrated on schools known to be improving in order to increase knowledge about how cultural changes lead to school improvement. A description is given of a perspective that emphasizes the cultural elements in effective schools and the interplay of culture and change. The concept of culture is defined and elaborated upon, identifying key assumptions about the cognitive and symbolic aspects of culture. Processes of cultural change and transformation are described. The paper concludes by describing five cultural domains or themes: (1) collegiality of faculty; (2) relationships within the community; (3) purposes and expectations of school leadership; (4) how work is conducted in the school; and (5) the knowledge base used for teaching by the school's faculty and administrators. (JD)

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STUDYING PROFESSIONAL CULTURES IN IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOLS

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STUDYING PROFESSIONAL CULTURES IN IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOLS

The effective schools research has generated many lists of characteristics of schools that are unusually successful in fostering the achievement of children of the urban poor (Newmann & Behar, 1982). However, these lists can be interpreted from at least two perspectives, and these perspectives have very different implications for how schools attempt to apply the effective schools research (Cohen, 1981). One view which focuses on such characteristics as the clarity and primacy of instructional goals, strong leadership, and careful monitoring of instruction suggests that effective schools conform fairly closely to classical models of the bureaucratic organization. From this perspective, schools can be improved by "tightening couplings" (e.g., Murphy & Hallinger, 1984), by strengthening the formal authority system of the school--e.g., more effective supervision, incentives for teachers--and using more rational, goal-based planning models.

An alternative view attends to the importance of overall school climate where staff share high expectations for students and assume responsibility for teaching and learning. This view emphasizes the shared values of all school participants and suggests that effective schools have what Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston, & Smith (1979) call a shared ethos. This cultural perspective is highly congruent with recent explorations of effective corporations (e.g., Peters & Waterman, 1982) and implies different approaches to school improvement. Rather than focusing on specific organizational arrangements or practices, a cultural perspective suggests the importance of a schoolwide transformation of values and

beliefs. However, the way such a transformation should take place, what values should change, and how those changes will be reflected in curriculum and instruction are far from clear.

This paper presents a conceptual framework for studying the processes of cultural transformation. Specifically, the study focuses on teachers because their beliefs, values, and behaviors profoundly affect student learning. It concentrates on the secondary level because: (1) so much reformist attention is currently focused there, (2) less is known about change in high schools than in elementary schools, and (3) what little is known about the secondary level suggests that change is more difficult there and that conventional rationalistic approaches are less likely to be effective than in elementary schools. Finally, the framework concentrates on schools that are known to be improving in order to increase knowledge about how cultural changes lead to school improvement and how modifications in school programs can transform professional cultures.

By describing the cultures of improving institutions and how those cultures change, this study will provide the basis for designing new approaches for improving secondary schools which are likely to be very different from those generated by the more bureaucratic perspective. Thus, this study should greatly enrich the array of strategies for improving high schools using the effective schools research. By doing so, it will contribute to a constructive debate on how to make these schools more effective.

First, this paper describes a perspective that emphasizes the cultural elements in effective schools and the interplay of culture and change. Next, it defines and elaborates the concept of culture, identifying key

assumptions. Processes of cultural change and transformation are then described to clarify those theoretical constructs that are applicable to educational settings. The paper concludes by describing five cultural domains or themes to guide field research.

Why Study Cultures?

The importance of culture in organizational analysis has been growing in recent years. Because cultural analysis stresses "questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, raising issues of context and meaning, and bringing to the surface underlying values" (Smircich, 1983:355), it captures unique facets of organizations and expands current knowledge. In addition, cultural elements have been associated with highly successful and productive organizations (Peters & Waterman, 1982). The effects of culture on change and of change on culture are important for understanding the transformation of organizations from mediocrity to effectiveness. Since cultures provide unique understandings and appear to contribute to success, a cultural approach will continue to be significant for researchers and for those who want to help their organizations become more successful. This section builds a rationale for studying cultures by briefly discussing the literature on school effectiveness and school change which highlights cultural elements.

Culture and Successful Schools

Researchers have long been interested in describing the characteristics of successful or effective schools. Specifically, they have searched for those school characteristics that affect the achievement

of the whole student body when the analysis controls for family background. A cadre of researchers set out to find and analyze those mostly-urban schools that seemed to be doing an exceptionally fine job of teaching children caught in the web of underachievement, low income or unemployed families, and hopelessness. From this research have come some profound and yet quite simple and ordinary (in the sense of daily) findings: schools should emphasize and reward learning; teachers should expect minimal basic skills mastery from all students; teachers should assume responsibility for teaching and for student learning; students should be regarded with respect and granted responsibility for the conduct of their lives; staff should engage in a continual process of critical self-examination and renewal; and staff should engage in certain specific practices such as using direct, immediate praise in the classroom, serving as role models by being punctual, and showing concern for the physical environment of the school and the emotional well-being of the children.

Some of these elements of effective schools describe specific practices or behaviors that teachers should engage in, while other elements touch the more elusive realm of attitudes, values, and beliefs--the culture of the school. The significance of culture is seen quite clearly in the work of Rutter and his colleagues (1979) who suggest a way to synthesize the findings on discrete practices and more implicit cultural values. They found that none of the specific practices identified in effective schools contributed to student achievement so much as the whole set of practices combined. The specific practices themselves were not as important as the way they came together to form a school ethos or culture that coalesced practices, beliefs, values, and norms into a caring community that fostered

positive development and growth in the adolescents who passed through the school's doors.

This same cultural theme is quite clear in recent studies of business. Deal and Kennedy (1982) argue that unusually successful corporations have special cultures. Similarly, Peters and Waterman (1982) are struck by the explicit attention that excellent corporations pay to values. Their list of attributes of highly successful corporations includes supporting a bias for action and valuing individual entrepreneurship as well as organizational arrangements like maintaining a simple form and a lean staff.

In sum, research on schools and businesses suggests that the most successful ones may have special characteristics. These characteristics include beliefs, practices, and organizational arrangements that come together to form a distinctive ethos or culture. If successful schools are characterized by distinctive cultures that display certain common (albeit general) attributes, then we have some guidelines for schools that want to become more successful. However, school-wide change processes are complex and little is known about how the cluster of school characteristics that makes up culture can be modified.

Culture and School Change

An important part of understanding how to modify school cultures is an understanding of the relationship between existing cultures and change efforts. Past research suggests that a school's culture will affect the acceptance of new practices. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) found that practices that were most compatible with existing values and activities

were most likely to be adopted. Similarly, Berman and McLaughlin (1975) found that when innovations were implemented in schools, they were usually modified to fit local values. Cultures also can affect the use of outside knowledge. Sarason (1971) argued that the failure of the new mathematics curriculum was partly a result of culture conflict: School and university people had different expectations that led to fatal misunderstandings. Wolcott (1977) documented the same phenomenon in efforts to apply program planning and budgeting to schools. Nevertheless, despite this gloomy picture, certain cultural conditions may promote school change. Although much of the school change research has been on innovations rather than organization-wide change, some useful inferences can be drawn.

The success of school improvement depends on people: central office and building-level administrative support and encouragement are crucial to successful change programs (Crandall & Loucks, 1983; Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). These key administrators set a tone that supports new practices, tolerates trial-and-error learning, and provides time and opportunities to experiment. Leaders also express values in their behaviors and can influence the development of cultural beliefs. Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984) summarize the importance of leaders and note that "this influence is often communicated through suasion and the assertion of high expectations" (p. 54).

Teachers also are crucial. If they believe improvement efforts will help them be more effective, teachers will support change (Fullan, 1982), but they generally require training, continuous assistance, and time to practice the new behaviors. Rosenblum and Louis (1981) found that teacher morale and collegiality promoted the successful implementation of

innovations. Similarly, Little (1982) found that teacher norms of collegiality supported experimentation and continuous improvement.

Thus, the values and beliefs of school people can affect change processes by encouraging innovative behavior or participation in change programs. To the extent that leaders influence organization-wide cultural values, they can promote and encourage norms of collegiality and continuous improvement. Leaders can also allocate resources supportive of change processes, thereby signalling that change is valued (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Teachers, in turn, may interact about professional matters, reflect and critique their own and other teachers' practice, and encourage attitudes supportive of change and improvement.

In summary, the effective schools literature and research on school change suggest the importance of cultures for both success and improvement. A focus on cultures permits the exploration of context, nuance, and taken-for-granted meaning. The next section describes the assumptions of a cultural perspective, elaborates some central concepts, and describes the implications of this approach.

Defining Culture

A cultural perspective on improving high schools makes certain assumptions about social reality. This section displays some of those assumptions and develops a definition of culture that emphasizes language and the importance of rule-making.

One critical assumption of a cultural perspective is that individuals have autonomy and engage in the simultaneous creation and interpretation of

unfolding events. Organizational reality is viewed as pluralistic, subjective, and dynamic. As Brown (1978:375) describes it,

> All of us to some degree design or tailor our worlds, but we never do this from raw cloth; indeed, for the most part we get our worlds ready to wear.

The design or tailoring of our worlds, however, takes place within a context; reality is not constructed do novo every moment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Shott, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981). People have personal histories and biographic idiosyncracies; organizations also have histories and idiosyncracies carried in the memories of participants and interpreted to newcomers as part of their socialization to the organization (Zucker, 1977). This interplay of individual idiosyncracy and collective meaning expresses itself in patterns of beliefs and values that we call culture.

Various authors offer definitions of culture. For example, Woods (1983:8) views cultures as "distinctive forms of life--ways of doing things and not doing things, forms of talk and speech patterns, subjects of conversation, rules and codes of conduct and behavior, values and beliefs, arguments and understandings." These forms of life develop when people come together for specific purposes, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Woods, 1983:8). Hansen describes culture as "a tool for organizing experience" (1979:3), while Goodenough defines it as the standards for deciding what is, what can be, how one feels about it, what to do about it, and how to go about doing it (1963:259). However, we find Wilson's (1971:90) definition the most parsimonious and useful:

> Culture is socially shared and transmitted knowledge of what is, and what ought to be, symbolized in act and artifact.

This definition calls attention to certain important aspects of the concept. First, culture is knowledge. It is carried in the minds of organizational members, learned by newcomers, and amenable to change. As an essentially cognitive phenomenon, culture's ultimate locus is in the individual (Goodenough, 1971:20) but is shared by community members and expressed symbolically. Both behavior--act--and the products of behavior--artifacts or cultural materials--carry cultural meaning. Behaviors and objects are not themselves culture, but rather are infused with symbolic meanings that form cultural content. This emphasis on the cognitive and, hence, symbolic quality of culture implies the importance of language as the most sophisticated and complex symbol system. Thus, the study of professional cultures should focus on language: how school people talk about their worlds, what they talk about and do not talk about, with whom, and where.

The definition of culture also draws attention to the notion that culture is both descriptive or interpretative, and prescriptive or normative. It provides knowledge (in Goodenough's term, standards) to help understand what is--to make sense of words, behaviors, and events appropriately. Culture also provides knowledge to guide one's own words and behavior--to prescribe what ought to occur in a given situation and thereby express the cultural norms governing behavior. These descriptive and prescriptive qualities underscore how culture shapes social rules or codes of conduct.

Thus, the definition developed here draws attention to the cognitive and symbolic aspects of culture as well as to the power of cultural knowledge to condition the meaning participants attach to events and to

define appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Cultural beliefs and values, however, are not static. Although culture is essentially conservative, it does change. The next section describes the processes of maintenance and change that imbue culture with dynamic qualities while conserving a society's traditional values.

Cultural Transformation

Culture tends to be a conservative, stabilizing force for any social system (Wilson, 1971; Hansen, 1979). Many aspects of a culture have a deep sense of obligation attached to them. People act and think in certain ways because they feel strongly that these are the right things to do and will resist changing such obligatory elements. In fact, enforcement mechanisms that are part of the culture--like ostracism or loss of status--may work against certain kinds of change.

Culture is also emergent--it grows and changes as it comes in contact with (or creates) new ideas and values. Culture is, thus, largely in process--it is both static and dynamic. When cultural beliefs are challenged, there will be conflict, dispute, disruption, or concern about the change. Participants' beliefs, values, and habitual actions may be threatened because change requires modifying their behavior in some way. As Fullan (1982:26) notes,

> real change, whether desired or not, whether imposed or voluntarily pursued, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty.

The status quo, or established order, is challenged when change is introduced. The knowledge of what is and what ought to be comes under

dispute, and the accepted meanings of everyday behavior are called into question.

Change Processes

Wallace (1970) postulates three types of cultural change processes that have applicability to school settings. These are (1) moving equilibrium processes, (2) paradigm development processes, and (3) revitalization processes (1970:183-199). The first, moving equilibrium, is a steady state: new cultural elements are acquired at about the same rate that others are discarded. Over time, the culture acquires some new content but there is no radical change. As the new elements diffuse through the culture, there are areas of espousal as well as lags. The more complex the social organization, the more likely there will be pockets of differential acceptance of the new (1970:184). This process could characterize change in the majority of American schools where fundamental purposes, role relationships, and authority systems have remained constant over the years, while new elements have been introduced and dysfunctional ones discarded. Thus, moving equilibrium is a steady state where elements may, over time, be added to or subtracted from the culture, but this type of change is unplanned and evolutionary. It suggests obtaining an historical perspective about high schools, and it underscores the importance of a series of small decisions made by individuals in effecting change. The importance of the school as a socializing agent is suggested by this process.

The second sort of process, paradigm development, occurs when new assumptions arise in a particular cultural domain or paradigm and

precipitate changes that eventually modify an entire set of cultural beliefs or values. New assumptions reverberate through the domain and ultimately create large-scale change. For example, cultural assumptions about educating children of the urban poor and minority groups underwent changes during the 1960s and 1970s. What began as a new belief that poor children and Black children should have the same opportunities to receive an education as more affluent white children ultimately lead to the infusion of billions of dollars from federal sources into the schools, elaborate and specialized bureaucracies at the federal and state levels to manage the newly-funded programs, and established new occupational categories at all levels of the education enterprise.

The third process, revitalization, occurs when one individual or a group of individuals deliberately and consciously sets out to change the culture. For this process to occur, certain pre-conditions must exist: cultural meanings have become discordant and corrupted by cataclysmic events such as war, famine, epidemic disease, subordinction, or through the more subtle processes of acculturation and internal decay. Cultural themes and meanings are no longer sustaining, technology does not work, and the social system breaks down. Symptoms of this stress include increases in vandalism, alcoholism, violence, intracultural strife, and breaking of marital or sexual taboos. Commitment to the public culture begins to wane and the individual feels increasingly disaffected (Goodenough, 1963:280-283). Behavior judged delinquent by the old culture increases and,

> people become increasingly frustrated, increasingly prone to irresponsible and delinquent behavior, increasingly concerned with the

> acquisition of real power (regardless of its legitimacy) in order to enforce compliance with their own wants from their fellows. (Goodenough 1963:281)

The culture, then, must be changed to reduce people's stress. Not unusually, this is achieved through the clear articulation of new cultural values by an ideological leader.

Revitalization focuses attention on antecedent conditions symptomatic of cultural distress in schools: vandalism, violence, lateness, absenteeism, interpersonal hostility, boredom, and so on. It also describes change process in a high school that has (or is being) "turned around" by a new strong leader. This was the case in Carver High School in Atlanta (described fully in Lightfoot, 1983) where the cataclysmic events were extreme poverty and hopelessness, as reflected in vandalism, poor attendance, and low achievement. This revitalization process may be an important aspect of improving high schools.

Thus, cultural change processes may be steady states where elements are introduced and discarded over time; they may be developmental and far-reaching as new assumptions reverberate through a culture; and, finally, change processes may be dramatic, as in the case of cultural dissolution and revitalization. Each process draws attention to particular features of the school setting that are important.

Culture and cultural change, thus far, are rather omnibus concepts. Their significance for school improvement or success comes from how the specific content of school culture--the domains of knowledge that describe everyday behavior--and change processes interact. The task, then, is to describe cultural content in improving high schools and how that content changes. The literature on effective schools and businesses, and research

on change suggest five domains that might comprise an improving high school's culture. The next section defines each of those domains, describes possible variations within them, and suggests indicators of each domain. It also discusses the possible effects of change on the beliefs, values, and behaviors subsumed under each.

Important Domains in Improving High Schools

The literature on effective schools and successful businesses points toward the importance of a cultural perspective on schools. However, that literature also suggests a laundry-list of cultural elements to look for. We propose that a cultural perspective can focus fruitfully on two categories governed by norms and values: (1) how people in the organization relate to other people, and (2) how individuals define their work. These categories capture a large part of organizational life, and both can be broken down further. Thus, how people relate to one another includes:

- collegiality--how they relate to other professionals regarding work; and
- community--how they relate to all others--children, parents, and cafeteria workers.

Similarly, the second category can be broken down into three domains:

- purpose and expectations--how the work is defined;
- action orientation--how the work is conducted; and
- knowledge base--what knowledge base the individual relies on to justify claims about the work.

These five domains are discussed in some detail next.

Collegiality

Collegiality is the sharing of work-related issues among professional staff. It involves interactions about instructional matters and requires respect, trust, and interest in colleagues' work. Rosenblum and Louis (1981) call this the cohesiveness of the work group, while both Spady (1984) and Wehlage (1982) suggest that collegiality entails joint decision-making about the work to be done and shared responsibility for its outcomes. It thus involves a commitment to teaching and to the other educators one works with (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984).

Norms of collegiality provide tacit boundaries on what work issues are talked about, with whom, and where. As rules governing everyday behavior, these norms can vary in scope or range thereby framing the content of teacher talk. Burlingame (1983) found that despite isolation in separate classrooms, teachers used the teachers' lounge to build feeling of commonality: "Tales told in the lounge thus became ways of joining teachers with other teachers" (page 45). The talk patterns avoided conflict, however, thereby preserving the appearance of equanimity and suggesting a norm of consensus.

Collegiality has been associated with successful schools. Little (1982) found that strong norms of collegiality were evident in a wide range of professional interaction with other teachers or administrators and that the interaction was often about instruction. Teachers also observed and critiqued one another and shared planning or preparation for teaching. In successful schools, teachers engaged in these behaviors more frequently, with a greater number and diversity of people and places, and with more concrete and precise language than in less successful schools. Capturing

the interactive aspect of collegiality, Spady (1984) describes the staff in excellent schools as "problem-solving teams."

Both Little's (1982) and Spady's (1984) characterizations suggest professional staff relations that are different from what we would typically expect. Instead of thinking of themselves as individuals acting alone and independently, teachers in successful schools apparently think of themselves and their colleagues as team members. Sharing ideas, concerns, problems, and working cooperatively on joint projects become the norm. This shift in conceptualization from solo practitioner to team member entails so much change that Spady (1984) calls it a "paradigm shift."

If collegial relations among professional staff is one hallmark of successful schools, then improving high schools may give evidence of the development or increase of collegiality. Little (1982) provides indicators of collegiality. These include frequent interactions about instruction among teachers or between teachers and other professionals (administrators, counselors); mutual observation and critique among teachers; shared responsibility for planning instructional activities; and joint preparation for teaching. In addition, changing schools might have more departmental meetings for planning, feedback, and brain-storming, modification of the schedule to provide joint preparation periods, or increased sharing of materials. Ultimately, increasing collegiality could be symbolized by a shift in language from "I" to "we."

However, there are certain structural features of all schools that make the development of collegial relations difficult. For example, schools have been described as "institutionalized organizations" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) that tightly control personnel categories (i.e., prescribe who

can teach what, to whom, and where) but leave uninspected the central activities of teaching and learning. This simultaneous loose-tight property of schools grants teachers wide autonomy in how they organize and conduct their classes. This autonomy is valued and would likely be protected by teachers. But autonomy seems to work against collegial relations.

Norms of collegiality could demand that teachers work together closely, know one another's work intimately, and share feedback on how the work is going. Beliefs or values supportive of these norms could disrupt the notion of teaching as an autonomous or private activity. Collegial norms might raise the visibility of a teacher's work among colleagues, subject it to inspection through mutual observation and to analysis through mutual critique, and, possibly, suggest changes in the way that work is carried out or in the very nature of work itself. Thus, changing norms might disrupt the established ideas of teaching that protect each teacher from inspection by peers. Teachers might experience threats to their pride and self-esteem because of changes in norms and expectations about behavior. It seems likely, then, that the development of collegial relations would have to overcome the dearly-held condition of autonomy that teachers have come to value and protect.

However, high schools also are characterized by physical arrangements that separate teachers into discrete classrooms where they spend most of their workdays in interaction with adolescents. This condition separates teachers from other adults, leading them to describe their work as lonely and isolating. This aspect of high schools could lead teachers to welcome the introduction of structures or processes that would foster communication

among the adults in the school and lead to more collegial relations. If structures to promote interaction are present, teachers may welcome the interactive parts of collegiality and come to accept the inspection and critique aspects. Finally, Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984:65) suggest that excellent schools encourage leadership behavior in everyone:

> Effective educational organizations spawn primary work groups and individual "champions" in unusual numbers. The designated leaders create an environment for trial and a tolerance for failure so that leaders can emerge and be sustained at all levels of the school system.

Thus, a collegial atmosphere--one characterized by sharing the "how-to" aspects of work, feelings of trust, respect, and tolerance for risk-taking--fosters a team approach where commitment to shared tasks is high.

Community

While collegiality addresses the professional relations among adults in schools, community touches the relations among everyone--adults and children alike. A sense of community means a collective sense of responsibility for what happens in the school and for what happens to one another. Moreover, it extends beyond the "work," i.e., cognitive learning, of children to include a more holistic concern for others' well-being. Community draws people in and ties them to the school.

A sense of community is associated with successful schools and well-run businesses. Like the clans in Ouchi's Theory Z companies (1981), successful schools bond people together and to the organization through a sense of concern. Wehlage (1982) captures this in an analysis of programs for marginal students. He attributes some of the success of these programs

to teacher culture, one aspect of which is a sense of extended role that concerns itself with all aspects of the children's lives. Teachers believed they were responsible to teach the "whole student" and helped students develop a sense of values and moral direction. The practices of this extended role communicated a sense of caring to the students.

A sense of community could be expressed in this widely-shared notion of personal caring. A high level of attention to the individual, as expressed in caring gestures, may help build commitment to the schools. This was found by Dornoyer (1984) in his study of an exemplary arts program in an elementary school. He noted that the principal enacted (and could articulate) a philosophy of "personal closeness" that was crucial to the development and quality of the school's program. Personal caring means that individuals are not anonymous; one's personal idiosyncracies, uniqueness, and problems are acknowledged and respected by others. Thus, improving schools may show some evidence of behaviors and language that support the idea of caring for the individual.

This reconceptualization of role may entail enormous changes in how teachers think about students, what they define as appropriate areas for concern, and what, as a result, their role-appropriate behavior is in a number of situations. This, too, will entail a paradigm shift. Working against these changes are a number of conditions in high schools that make the development of a sense of community difficult. One is the way students are defined relative to the school.

Students have been formally defined as members, clients, and products of schools (see Schlecty, 1976, for a discussion). Each definition carries certain expectations that define how the role encumbent will relate to

others and how others will relate to the role encumbent.

Student-as-product is perhaps the most pervasive definition, implying a "tabula rasa" state that is acted upon by the schooling process. Metz (1978) describes this as the incorporative definition of student and teaching. If students are products of the educational process, a teacher's sense of value or self-esteem derives from the quality of that product, i.e., academic achievement or attractiveness on the labor market. Much of the emphasis on achievement in the effective schools literature reflects a student-as-product definition.

Both other definitions, student-as-member or as-client, reveal relationships of more equity between students and other actors in the school setting. Membership implies full-fledged, equitable participation, while being a client reveals an economically-based, self-interested, contingent relationship. In either conceptualization, student have power relative to other actors and participate in the educational process. This view is described by Metz (1978) as developmental. Building a sense of community in a high school could entail determining what the everyday definition of students in the school is and, if necessary, changing it. Since most schools seem to operate with a tacit definition of students as products, it seems likely that this definition would undergo change.

In addition, improving high schools might show evidence of attempts to overcome the effects of large size. High schools (especially urban ones) are large places, often housing over 2500 adolescents. Teachers may see 150 different faces over the course of a day. Metz (1982) remarks how, despite the fact that there is yet no conclusive evidence that large size impedes school effectiveness,

> most of us with experience in schools have probably developed an intuitive feel for advantages of small size (p. 109).

Newmann and Behar (1982:42) remark that in larger organizations there is more potential for people to feel alienated. Gump and Barker (1964:202) describe this as a feeling of redundancy. That is, as high schools grow larger, the additional students become redundant for its various functions. As students become unnecessary, a larger proportion are unable to participate in the activities that bind them to the life of the high school.

The literature on excellent companies suggests that here, too, internal structures are created that help to counteract the sheer size of the organization. Within a small group, people feel known and regarded as unique. Effectiveness is attributed, in part, to the individual's sense of belonging to a small unit; this lessens the impersonality of a large organization. Improving high schools may incorporate these ideas, developing atmospheres of smallness and belonging for both teachers and students.

A third structure that works against feelings of community is the schedule. In high schools, scheduling has become a full-time computer-assisted function. Often there is one vice principal in charge of scheduling. Owens (1984:17) describes scheduling as

> a powerful and readily visible management technique for exercising managerial control and coordination.

The schedule controls students, teachers, and space so that all are accounted for; none are unscheduled for any moment of the day. Changes in the schedule can be difficult if not impossible to effect. A vignette from our current work provides an example:

> The setting is a large (2500 students) urban high school. Scheduling is done by one administrator with the assistance of a computer. Scheduling is called "organization" in this school; thus, the computer room is called "the organization room."
>
> One of the teachers in this high school had a fairly severe heart attack. When he could return to work, he was unable to climb the stairs to his usual second-floor room. The department head requested room changes for all Mr. Folly's classes. Once scheduled into a room on the first floor, he could meet his classes and teach them, it was argued.
>
> "The organization room" wouldn't meet this request. Oh, Mr. Folly could teach in the first room; that would be OK. But he would have to teach the classes already scheduled into that room. Room changes for Mr. Folly's classes would have involved too much disruption to a somewhat sacrosanct schedule.

This vignette provides an illustration of an extreme situation. Clearly, in this high school, the scheduling person and the schedule itself wield considerable power: Protecting the schedule was more important than accommodating a convalescing teacher. Attempts to build school-wide community feelings in this school would have to break down the rigidity of the schedule.

Owens (1984:17) also remarks on the power of the schedule to affect members' perceptions of time:

> People will say, "I'll see you third period" (not 9:14); or in recounting an event during the day, "It happened late in the fifth period."

He concludes that "the precision and power of the schedule to control is a dominant characteristic" (p. 17) of the school he studied. Even more telling, it was a tool of managerial control of which the principal seemed hardly aware.

A sense of community, then, could be described as the glue that holds all the disparate parts of the school together and forges it into a coherent, successful organization.

Purpose and Expectations

Successful schools and well-run companies have a sense of themselves: they know what they are about (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). They stay focused on their primary tasks, allow experimentation at the periphery, and convey a clear sense of purpose. In Peters and Waterman's (1982) term, they "stick to the knitting;" in Clark, Lotto, and Astuto's (1984:65), they "pay attention to the task at hand." Successful schools have a clear focus: Strict attention is paid to teaching and learning. The classroom is protected from unwanted intrusions and extraneous activities are of secondary concern, if they are engaged in at all.

In addition to clear goals, successful schools reveal patterns of high expectations (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Individuals have a keen sense of personal efficacy and expect the same from those around them. Administrators hold high expectations for teachers; teachers expect the most from the principal. Students expect good teaching and a challenge; teachers hold high expectations for all students.

The effective schools literature suggests that, in the case of students, expectations should focus on academic achievement, usually narrowly defined. Such achievement, however, is only one area where high expections have results. The literature on programs designed to motivate marginal high school students suggests that high expectations are fruitfully applied to student behavior and discipline in the school. And, a vignette from our current work suggests that high expectations for behavior also are productively applied to teachers:

> The high school has been experiencing "creeping tardiness" among the teachers. Some were arriving later and later to work. The roll book for teachers to sign in sits on the main office desk--a long, narrow barrier between four secretaries and any visitors to that office. Disliking the increasing lateness, the principal decided to take swift action. At 8:25 a.m., the roll book was removed from the main office and placed on his desk. Any teacher arriving after 8:25 a.m. had to sign the book in front of the principal. Although not technically "late," teachers were embarrassed to enter his office and sign in. Teacher tardiness declined dramatically.

Thus, high expectations can apply to the achievement of students, teachers, and administrators, and can also apply to orderly behavior. One of the tasks of high schools is to refine the adolescents' sense of self-control. High expectations for disciplined behavior convey powerful messages about respect for others and for property. Thus, high expectations can incorporate beliefs about how people should perform and about how they should relate to one another.

However, [illegible] researchers have found indications that high school teachers and students have struck a "deal" (Cusik, 1973; Sizer, 1984) which suggests low expectations, at least for achievement. The deal can be described as the student offering attendance in class and docile behavior in exchange for limited pressure from the teacher to perform academically. This negotiated aspect of classroom life is a notable feature of high schools. It implies that students and teachers are co-conspirators in presenting the appearances of learning and order in the classroom. Order has become the ultimate goal with academic learning as the trade-off.

Typical improvement efforts focus on learning or, at least, measured student achievement. It seems likely that such initiatives would disrupt the negotiated order between students and teachers. Teachers would be under pressure for their students to show evidence of greater learning, and

students would be under pressure to produce greater amounts of effort. Thus, the study of cultures could explore how improvement efforts focusing on increased learning or achievement are negotiated between teachers and students at the classroom level. Of particular interest might be how the new order is negotiated, what conflict or disputes are associated with it, and the trade-offs that ensue.

Spady (1984) suggests that many of these changes might involve "paradigm shifts" in how teachers think of their profession, each other, administrators, and children. Thus, teachers in excellent high schools think of themselves as team members as well as subject-matter specialists. And they conceive of children not in terms of their instrumental value as "economic producers," but rather in their future roles as "global citizens." Each of these new conceptualizations is considerably more than re-labelling. Each entails a fundamental shift in thinking for and about teachers and students. The new concepts emphasize relatedness and responsibility to others. These are profoundly different concepts of teacher and student than historical ones.

Action Orientation

Successful businesses and, by implication, successful schools reveal a predilection for action rather than reflection, for trial-and-error rather than strategic planning. The focus is on implementation, action, test models, and trials. The goal is to see ideas translated into products or materials, lessons or classes. In these schools, one gets a feeling of energy, of activity, and of action. Successful schools are not passive places.

Schools, however, have been criticized as being excessively faddish. With each new program or curriculum that comes along, so the criticism goes, schools jump on the bandwagon. As Cuban says regarding the effective schools research (1984:130), "practitioners seldom wait for researchers to signal that school improvement can move forward." Faddishness is not the focus here; instead it is on the importance of self-renewal, small experiments, and trials before the commitment of large-scale resources. Rather than committee-talk to evaluate the potential of a new idea, material, or program, an action oriented school would try it out on a small scale to see how it works. Thus, an action orientation means an attitude of self-renewal that is reflected in small-scale trials, risks, tolerance for failure, and a willingness to cut one's losses.

An action orientation has not been studied in schools. Its importance comes through reasoning by analogy from the excellent companies literature. It seems likely that this domain would be present in improving schools. It might evidence itself in increasing honesty regarding performance and willingness to admit failure among teachers. Staff might be more willing to ask for advice from colleagues or to "try something new" on their own. It could entail more use of resource centers or curriculum libraries, or a more problem-solving orientation in department meetings. Thus, a bias for action reflects a self-renewing, improvement-oriented constellation of values.

Once again, however, certain structural characteristics of high schools work against the development of an action orientation. One is the fundamentally conservative nature of the schooling process when seen as the socialization of youth. Inculcating cultural values is a protective,

conserving process that deflects attempts at change. Since change, especially improvement, is the rationale for an action orientation, it seems likely that these will conflict.

Second, high school teaching staff have become older, tenured and, in some cases, staid. Although one could expect those who are most secure in their positions (tenured) to be most willing to take risks, this is not often the case. The vitality and creativity of educational organizations requires the regular infusion of youth, a problem recently recognized in colleges and universities. Thus, the very nature of the professional staff in high schools could work against the infusion of an action orientation.

Despite these obstacles, improving high schools might show some evidence of this basic belief in the value of self-renewal. It is likely, however, that this belief will cause distress and anger among some staff. The development of, dispute about, and growing adherence to, this cultural value could be traced.

The Knowledge Base for Teaching

Another important domain of a school's professional culture is its definition of the knowledge base for teaching. This knowledge base defines what constitutes legitimate and useful information about how to go about the act of teaching. This area has received considerably less attention than some of the others discussed so far, probably because it is considered less important to educators. According to Simpson and Simpson (1969:203), "the main intrinsic appeal of the semi-professions (including teaching) is to the heart, not the mind." More recently, Gideonse (1983: iv) has argued that "rigorous commitment to either the knowledge base or inquiry practices

in support of instruction does not now characterize. . . the operation of the Nation's schools." He concludes that if educators' actions were based on a sounder knowledge base and on the capacity to conduct their own research, schools would become more effective.

In broad terms, one can imagine three occupational definitions that define the teaching knowledge base quite differently. Each of these has different implications for the ways that educators in improving schools seek out and evaluate educational practices. First, teaching (or counseling or any of the other specialities found in a high school) might be considered a <u>science</u>. Where professionals view teaching as a science, there would be continuing efforts to "keep up with the field" by taking courses, attending inservice programs or conferences, and reading relevant journals. When identifying problems and solutions, professionals would try to use the best available expert advice, defining expertise in terms of research competence. They would also evaluate new ideas in terms of both the procedures used and the scientific ability of the people advocating them. When unique solutions to local problems are needed, there would be a heavy premium on using "scientific" procedures to arrive at an answer. As a result of this orientation, educators who define teaching as a science would be particularly open to new ideas and also have a critical capacity to evaluate them.

Second, teaching can be viewed as a <u>craft</u>. The knowledge base of a craft consists of a set of skills and some understanding of when and where to apply them. This knowledge is developed through trial and error, and a good deal of trial and error is used to apply it. In a craft-oriented

school, there would be the sharing of techniques among educators. When trying to solve problems, teachers would rely on the ideas of other practitioners rather than experts, and they would try out new ideas to see if they work. Single successful trials might be more important for validation than results from a research design. Teachers would assess the knowledge of experts by asking "how long did you teach and how long ago" and "did you teach in settings like mine," rather than by querying the person's research background or academic credentials. There would be less openness to new ideas in a craft-oriented school and more willingness to go with what has worked in the past than in a school where teaching was seen as a science. Still, people who see their work as a craft would likely be pragmatic and willing to try new approaches that could be shown to work better.

Third, teaching can be viewed as an art. This definition places less emphasis on knowledge and more on innate ability. In an art, "some people have it and some don't." Artists fill themselves with relevant experience and wait for the muse to strike. Some people frequently come up with good solutions to the problems they face while others do not. This view of education is more conservative than either of the other two. People would not seek out new knowledge and would not likely be receptive to it or worry about ways to evaluate it. Even if something could be shown to be successful, there would likely be an objection that "it won't work for me."

These five domains focus a study of professional cultures on certain elements in improving high schools. These domains derive from the research literature and suggest areas that may be important. The research findings of such a study provide an alternative perspective on the school improvement enterprise and would suggest interventions different from the bureaucratic perspective. As such, a study of professional cultures in improving high schools can expand the research paradigms in use and contribute to the growing knowledge about how schools change.

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